



Finitude's Clamor; Or, Notes toward a Communitarian Literacy

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D. Diane Davis

Finitude's Clamor; Or, Notes toward a Communitarian Literacy

To the extent that rhetoric and writing studies bases its theories and pedagogies on the self-present composing subject—the figure of the writer who exists apart from the writing context, from the “world,” from others—it is anti-communitarian. Communication can take place only among beings who are given over to the “outside,” exposed, open to the other’s effraction. This essay therefore calls for the elaboration of a “communitarian” literacy that understands reading and writing as functions of this originary sociality, as expositions not of who one is (identity) but of the fact that “we” are (community).

What should be clearly brought out is the fact of finitude's excessive nature, not only because of the inappropriability of its meaning . . . but, as the experience of sheer exposition, because of the way it refuses to disclose itself fully.

—Avital Ronell, *Finitude's Score*

We think too much in terms of history, whether personal or universal. Becomings belong to geography, they are orientations, directions, entries and exits.

—Gilles Deleuze, *Dialogues*

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Idioms must be possible that resist the bloody idiocies of identities indicated by blood, soil, and self. Identities must write themselves, that is, they must know and practice themselves as non-identifiable (k)nots of sense.

—Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*

In his collected letters, Gustave Flaubert details his fascination with a certain inscription he encountered during his trip to the Orient. Someone had carved the name THOMPSON in enormous lettering on Pompey's column, prompting Flaubert to complain that "There's no way to see the column without seeing the name 'Thompson' and consequently without thinking of Thompson." With a hint of muffled jealousy, Flaubert quips that "this idiot has become part of the monument and perpetuates himself with it" (qtd. in Culler 176). In her forthcoming book, *Stupidity*, Avital Ronell addresses said idiot's "passage into perpetuity," observing that this "self-magnifying" Thompson "parasit[es] the Egyptians," signing "up the ageless monument for his own little tourist's sense of time and place and manages still, if inadvertently, to hitch a ride with the corpses of the pharaohs." What gets Flaubert, she notes, is not just that "this Thompson nobody, bloated and self-important, felt that his name deserved to be brandished, mummified, sculpted upon the unreadable meaning of the column" but that "the gigantic lettering imposes itself with certitude, an early John Hancock of righteous insistence" (19–20).

"Uninhibited by the grandeur of the desecration," this Thompson person apparently *felt no shame*—though, in keeping with Flaubert's "excremental politics," Ronell suggests that he "can be seen to have left a huge turd where a monument once stood" (20). For Flaubert, the sheer size of the lettering indicates the sweet "serenity" of stupidity, which in this case takes the form of unabashed self-assurance, an inscription of self-certainty that really stops Flaubert in his tracks. "Unless one is a complete jerk," says Ronell, paraphrasing Flaubert, "one leaves this earth insecure over one's name: one remains stupid about its destination." But "Thompson," she adds, "his name arrived" (20).

The myth of immanence

Thompson can be "read" allegorically as a casualty of the myth of human immanence, a singular being driven by the notion that he's equal to his signature, that he's a self-conscious self-presence, who is therefore *presentable*—and who presents himself via his own magnificent inscription, which in turn reaffirms the myth, scoring one for its mimetic function. And a good bit of rhetoric and

composition pedagogy, it seems to me, hails students *as* Thompsons, reproducing the myth (in every student) by pushing the figure of the self-present *composing* subject. This subject, Sharon Crowley observes, fancies itself “sufficiently discrete from the composing context to stand apart from it, observing it from above and commenting on it” (213). Writing-process pedagogy switched the focus of the writing class from texts onto students, Crowley notes, taking student subjectivity *as* its subject. Process pedagogy from the beginning pushed “the construct of the self-directed student,” which Gordon D. Rohman originally described as the student “who stands at the center of his own thoughts and feelings with the sense that they begin in him” (qtd. in Crowley 197).

Of course, this notion of the composing subject has been massively critiqued by feminist and critical composition pedagogues, who aim to help the self-directed student come to terms with the ways in which her thoughts are always already shaped by her own historical and cultural situatedness. From there, though, the challenge is typically to help the student writer become conscious of and then to speak from her own radical positioning—that is, to embrace an identity founded on that positioning and to disclose it in writing as the basis for her own arguments and ideas. Susan Jarratt and Nedra Reynolds, for instance, call for a pedagogy that encourages students to “identify themselves and those to whom they write and speak within the networks of gender, class, and power” (57). Patricia Bizzell argues that the pedagogical task today is to help students discover their histories, identify with them, and then communicate them to each other. John Clifford argues that it’s our duty as writing teachers to “help students to read and write and think in ways that . . . encourage self-consciousness about who they are and can be in the social world” (51). And so on.¹

It’s not my intention to conflate these diverse pedagogical approaches nor to diminish the significance of their efforts to overcome the delusion of universality and its attendant discriminations and oppressions. But taken together these approaches do seem to support Crowley’s argument that “student identities are the subject of composition” (227). Even radical writing pedagogies, that is, which presume that identity is constituted and plural, have a tendency to reproduce the myth of immanence by encouraging students to consider themselves *presentable*. Inasmuch as this is the case, they (inadvertently?) hail Thompsons—not simply writers prone to fits of self-assertion but more im-

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portantly: writers very sure of who they are and what they know, very certain that they exist “sufficiently discrete” from the writing context, from the “world,” from others (213).

To hail students as Thompsons is to hail them not as “happenings” or “becomings” but as immanent *subjects*, whether born or made. It’s to encourage

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students to trace and retrace what Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* call their “molar lines,” lines of “rigid segmentarity” associated with a so-called personal history, at the expense of their “molecular” and/or “flight” lines, which are more supple and, Deleuze and Claire Parnet observe, “don’t even have the same rhythm as [their] ‘history’” (124). Molar lines repress *différance* and manifest allergies to becomings, constituting fixed

and normalized identities via oppositional concepts (self/other, male/female, white/black, rich/poor, etc.). “So many dichotomies will be established that there will be enough for everyone to be pinned to the wall, sunk in a hole,” Parnet observes. And “even divergences of deviancy will be measured according to the degree of binary choice; you are neither white nor black, Arab then? Or half-breed? You are neither man nor woman, transvestite then?” (21). This “white wall/black hole system” proffers the myth of self-presence, and though it allows one to speak from and for particular positions, it does so at too great a cost, promoting a kind of political/social economy at the expense of the experience of *community*. This is my concern: Community takes a hit with every point immanence racks up. And to the extent that it leaves Thompsons in both the sender and receiver slots of any variation of the “communication triangle,” rhetoric and composition come down on the side of immanence.

It seems to me an ethical imperative in our field today to begin elaborating a kind of “communitarian” literacy, a literacy which presumes first of all that writers and readers are *in* the world and *exposed* to others, a literacy that can read and write *writing* as a function of this irreparable exposure, of this irrepressible community. Responding to this imperative would involve developing rhetorics on writing that foreground the writer’s radical *ineffability* and writing pedagogies that invite students to embrace precisely what divides them *as* what they share: their finitude, “the infinite lack of infinite identity” (Nancy, *Inoperative* xxxviii). Here, I can attempt only a preliminary response to this imperative, some notes toward a communitarian literacy designed to *open* the conversation. We’ll need to back up to get going.

Finitude

Finitude is what, in singularity and as singularity, withdraws from the infinite grasp, from the molar expansion and furious devastation of an ego-ity of being.

—Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*

Right away I need to acknowledge with Jean-Luc Nancy two different senses of presence: There is the supposedly representable presence of the “platonic Idea,” which is “firmly standing . . . immobile and impassive,” and there is the coming *into* presence that is associated with the “irrepresentable,” with finitude, which, always coming, could never be “written or presented in any way” (*Birth ix-x*). The former (re/representable presence) would be a symptom, an *arrested* effect of the latter, of a “there is” that exceeds all representational grasp. To consider oneself presentable is to mis/take the imminence (to-come) of one’s own ex-istence for an immanent, “firmly standing” presence. Apparently, given the jumbo-sig, Thompson had already been (mis)taken—that is, he had already been taken (over), written on or inscribed by the myth.

To consider oneself presentable is to mis/take the imminence (to-come) of one’s own ex-istence for an immanent, “firmly standing” presence.

Nonetheless, his very urge to *prove* himself re/representable (via the over-enthusiastic signature) indicates that his experience of self-presence is punctuated by an anxiety-inducing question mark. It’s in (re)affirmation of his own mythic borders, then, that he asserts himself: THOMPSON. But the assertion misses its mark; not only is his entire irrepresentable being “ex-scribed” (as Nancy puts it) from the very first in-scribing scrrratch, but even Thompson-as-signified, as-*concept*, the supposed subjecthood from which he writes, refuses to come clean. His (gigantic) signature “functions like a bad check,” as Ronell once said of another sig line, “destined to collapse upon itself and bounce” (*Crack Wars* 107). Bouncing and ssslipping—tormented by “an internal drifting,” Derrida might say (*Post Card* 489)—this signature inscribes precisely the *dashed* hopes of (re)presentation: As Jonathan Culler observes, Thompson “did not achieve anything”; he only immortalizes “a name borne by many others, and it is precisely that absence of efficacy which gives his inscription its profound stupidity” (176).

We’ll want to follow Ronell and Culler’s lead, though, and resist the urge to *other* Thompson, to lump (or *dump*, since exclusion is excretion) him into some assembly of stupids who can be safely zoned off and out—as Victor J. Vitanza says of Heidegger, Thompson is *one of us*. The point is not to condemn

Thompson (whoever s/he was, and anyway, who would be exempt from this critique?) but rather to acknowledge a certain *will-to-immanence*, a demand that meaning and being come clean, which indicates precisely that they do *not* come clean, that they elude us perpetually. Because both being and meaning are excessive, radically inappropriable, always-coming—finite—slippage is a given; it's the one thing we can count on. But to be inappropriable, to exceed

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yourSelf, also means: to be exposed, open, shared (out); finite being, Nancy observes, “*is above all being-outside-itself*” (*Inoperative* 24). This “outside,” Giorgio Agamben explains, “is not another space that resides beyond the determinate space, but rather, it is the passage, the exteriority that gives it access—in a word, it is its face, its *eidōs*,” which is never turned toward itself but always toward other faces. There's no inside/outside dichotomy here: Straddling the limit, finite being exists *as* threshold, *as* exposure; think of it as “being-*within* an *outside*,” as Agamben puts it, being *ek-static* (67). “To be exposed,” Nancy says, “means to be ‘posed’ in exteriority . . . having to do with an outside *in the very intimacy* of an inside” (*Inoperative* xxxvii). It's from this ordinary sociality that subjectivity extracts itself.

Sharing (that is: community) takes place not among similarly positioned subjecthoods—subjects share no/thing *as* subjects—but (only) at the extreme and exposed limit of subjectivity, where (a finite) being irrepressibly exceeds itSelf. And it's to this uncanny excess that “third sophistic” scanners tune their receptors, straining in the name of community toward the ek-static communications of beings-*outside-their-Selves*, “a-subjectivities,” as Vitanza puts it (*Negation* 233), abandoned to their own infinite finitude and forming what Ronell describes as a “community without essence, without a substantial project . . . a community shattered and way past the mirror stage of self-recuperation” (*Finitude's* 2). Third sophistic ears, that is, attune themselves to community's communications, to the clamor of an inappropriable exteriority (sociality) that withdraws from signification but that nevertheless rustles and rumbles incessantly, re-introducing us to our finitude.

The near ubiquitous operations of the myth of human immanence, however, make these communications almost unhearable—or else hearable only as *noise*, interference that would interrupt the subject's (vain) attempts to represent some kind of common being or social essence in “sites, persons, buildings, discourses, institutions, symbols: in short, in subjects” (Nancy, *Inoperative*

31). But if finitude is what (and all) we share, then community cannot be produced. It can, however, be *exposed*: not in any work (any representation or figuration) but in that which exceeds, interrupts, or incompletes both the work of subjects and the subject *as* a work (of the dialectical process). Whereas community is not the product of speech or writing, it is *exposed* in every speech and every writing: A communitarian literacy would devote itself to reading and writing *for* this exposition.

Communitarian writing explicitly interrupts the myth, but even Thompson's inscription, inasmuch as it necessarily *missed* its mark, is an exposition of finitude. One really has to be attuned, though, to pick it up; one has to learn to read with one's *ears*, as Ronell puts it in *The Telephone Book*, to tune into noise frequencies, to strain toward what Krista Ratcliffe has called the rustle of "the exiled excess" (203). But because most rhetorics of communication take off from what Thomas Kent deems "internalist" presumptions, they encourage a "writing" that perpetuates the myth and a "reading" that is oblivious to its interruptions. To speed us up on this point, we'll catch a ride with Kent.

Internalist rhetorics

In *Paralogic Rhetoric*, Kent argues that "most current research in discourse production adheres to the Cartesian claim that a split exists between the human mind and the rest of the world," which is "out there" waiting to be discovered (97). This act of discovery—connecting one's mind to others and to "reality"—involves some kind of mediating "epistemological network that the 'I' employs to know reality" (97). These mediating networks are also variously called "mental categories," "signs," "social norms," or "conceptual schemes," and according to philosopher Donald Davidson, who is Kent's primary influence, they are "the points of view from which individuals, cultures, or periods survey the passing scene" (qtd. in Kent, *Paralogic* 81). Because internalists locate meaning and language within these conceptual schemes, they take "human subjectivity" to be "the starting point for every investigation of meaning and language use" (Kent, *Paralogic* 98).

Kent illustrates his point by rereading the taxonomy of composition theories that Lester Faigley worked out in "Competing Theories of Process"—which came out way back in 1986 but, tellingly, remains current—pointing up the internalism inherent not only in expressivist and cognitivist rhetorics on composing but also in what Faigley calls "the social view" or what James Berlin, in his own taxonomy, calls social-epistemic rhetoric. Expressivists claim that in-

nate mental categories either *constitute* or *frame* reality, and cognitivists claim that innate mental processes *represent* reality; therefore, for both, Kent observes, discourse production involves “getting in touch with one’s own internal subjectivity” (*Paralogic* 98–101). This much is old news. But Kent continues: Social constructionists focus on social norms and claim that subjectivity is

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produced via shared social conventions. Because each community is said to operate via its own social norms or conceptual schemes that represent the world and constitute subjects, moving from one community to another requires that one learn new schemes and/or be re-constituted, so to speak. Though the “objective

world” does exist “out there” somewhere, according to social constructionists there’s no getting at it since we only come into contact with the communal conceptual schemes that mediate between the subjects they constitute and the “reality” that remains out of bounds (Kent, *Paralogic* 101). So even though it sounds weird, social constructionism also takes off from internalist assumptions. All three approaches perpetuate the myth of immanence inasmuch as they presume that singular beings exist apart from one another or from the world or both—inasmuch as they do not affirm singular being as always already *with-others-in-the-world*.

Kent’s alternative

In contradistinction to these internalist theories of communication, Kent offers an alternative theory that assumes there is no private language, that “thoughts and mental states derive from the external world of communicative interaction” rather than the other way around (*Paralogic* 107). In this formulation, the subject is nothing without the other: “without the other, we can have no thoughts, no language, no cognizance of meaning, no awareness that we possess something we call mental states” (*Paralogic* 108). But against/alongside the more or less stable community of social constructionism, Kent proposes a “community” that takes place (only) in the here and now of communicative interaction, which brings subjects into being, each time, in the instant of interpretation or understanding that it makes possible. He calls this an externalist approach because it does not make the communicating subject a “prisoner” to private language or social norms—social norms do not mediate between communicants and the world, he says, rather, the interpreta-

tion that takes place in communicative interaction has always already “determine[d] our social norms” (*Paralogic* 118).

We owe Kent a big one for taking us a long way very quickly. And yet, I want to throw up a warning sign because I can see from here that this “other” on whom Kent’s triangulating subject depends is infinitely appropriable and so perhaps not *other* at all, really, but a version of the Same. The community delineated in Kent’s notion of “communicative interaction” is a function of hermeneutic understanding, which indicates a turning not toward but *away* from the outside, from the Other. Appropriations of the inappropriable are dead ahead, in other words, and our ride’s about to get bumpy.

Communicative interaction, Kent continues, is a function of this “triangulation” (Davidson’s term), in which each creature contributes knowledge of her own mind, knowledge of other minds, and knowledge of a shared world. <bump> After all, he says, once “we know our own minds, we invariably know the minds of others, for we could not know our own minds if we could not get in touch with concepts and objects outside ourselves” (*Paralogic* 92). “Clearly,” Kent says, “when we communicate—when we employ language to get things done in the world—we always share concepts; if we did not share concepts, if we had no idea about the mind of another or about the world we share, communication would be impossible” (*Paralogic* 108). <b-big bumps>

We understand each other in no small part, Kent claims, because meaning is a function of communicative interaction. That is, Kent, following Davidson and Richard Rorty, argues that we judge an utterance to be true not because it “represents reality or corresponds to something beyond the web of beliefs in which we are always situated,” but because it manages to “cohere to other sentences we already believe to be true” (*Paralogic* 105). And this suggests that truth, knowledge, and meaning are intricately intertwined: “when we have one,” Kent says, “we have the other two” (*Paralogic* 105). <bump bump> An act of “charity” gets this snowball of understanding rolling; the “necessary precondition for all social communicative interaction” (*Paralogic* 184), Kent says, is an initiatory agreement between communicants to “minimize error and maximize agreement concerning the meaning of another’s utterances” (*Paralogic* 104). At the outset of any encounter, the interpreter agrees not only to disregard any unintentional “marks and noises” but also to take as true anything the speaker holds as true so that she will be free to “translate” the speaker’s words into her own; this translation will lead her to attribute to the speaker beliefs that agree with her own, since one’s words are inextricably tied up with one’s beliefs. The speaker, too, assumes that her words will be taken as true,

which leads her to attribute to the interpreter beliefs that agree with her own. <bump bump> From there, of course, disagreement is possible.

Communicative interaction requires “on-the-spot interpretations,” or “hermeneutic guesses,” as Kent calls them, which “cannot be reduced to a schematic cognitive process or to any kind of epistemological system” (*Paralogic* 109). They are formulated in the moment of triangulation’s give and take and can’t be formulated in advance. Kent quotes Rorty: “If we ever succeed in communicating easily and happily, it will be because [your] guesses about what I’m going to do next . . . and my own expectations about what I shall do or say . . . come more or less to coincide” (qtd. in *Paralogic* 111). But—and here we’ll have to thank Kent for the lift and hop out—Rorty, Davidson, and Kent also all argue, Kent says, that “our guesses are always good enough and that the ‘rough maxims and methodological generalities’ we employ to get things done in the world constitute all we need to know about the production of discourse” (*Paralogic* 111). In fact, Kent argues:

when we understand another’s utterances—when ‘we can translate his words into ours’—we also understand the other’s beliefs and intentions, and by accepting the fact that we cannot be completely wrong about the beliefs and intentions of others, we avoid the dualism of self and world as well as the kindred problem of universal skepticism. Therefore, when we communicate, we must be right—at least most of the time—about our beliefs. (106)

Paralogic ssslipage

*If there must be an imperative to understand, this is
because understanding does not come but remains
lost to us.*

—Avital Ronell, *Stupidity*

Now, that hit me as a bit of a shocker. I didn’t expect *Paralogic Rhetoric* to land us in this neighborhood—I thought it would take us out of town—and it may take me a page or four to get us back on (or, more precisely: *off*) track. The title is what threw me: I thought we were headed for another kind of paralogy. But it turns out that the term circulates differently in Kent’s work than it does in Jean-François Lyotard’s. (Language is like that.) Kent puts it into the service of hermeneutics: The “guesswork” involved in communicative interaction, he says, is “paralogical in nature because no logical framework, process, or system can predict in advance the efficacy of our guesses” (5). Lyotard’s paralogy, however, aligns itself with a *posthermeneutic* impulse: Respecting both “the desire for

justice and the desire for the unknown" (*Postmodern* 67), paralogy strives "to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable" ("Answering" 81). If hermeneutic understanding is Kent's aim, it is—in an entirely different and rigorous sense—Lyotard's *target*: Hermeneutic understanding and the often subterranean consensus (convention, custom, standard) that founds it are precisely what Lyotard's paralogy wages war against ("Answering" 82). Indeed, when Vitanza introduced Lyotard's version of paralogy to rhetoric and composition in "Critical Sub/Versions" in 1987, he demonstrated its alignment with a counter-terrorist, *sub/versive* rhetoric that operates "without the the philosophical-Rhetorical pretensions of adjudicating 'hermeneutical understandings'" and that "identifies, detonates, and exploits the [interpretive] differences" (42). Lyotard's paralogy heads for the "*unintelligible*" (*Postmodern* 54), cranking up the inappropriable excess in order to delay hasty *homologia* and so to interrupt the premature ejaculations of "justice" that it can legitimate (*Postmodern* 61).

That's where I thought we were headed—outside the city/civil limits, into the *pagus*, where "nothing is fixed by genus [and] everything is fluid," as Vitanza puts it (*Negation* 52), fluid and up for "molecular negotiations" (Deleuze and Guattari 223). Of course, hermeneutics does involve a trip to the outskirts, breaking with fantasies of immediacy and issuing an interpretive imperative that owns up to the fact that no matter how close (near/intimate) the other is, communications between you have to traverse a static-filled distance. However, the instant a hermeneutic approach believes it has *closed* the distance, the moment the "guesswork" *lands* on an understanding it deems "good enough," it outs itself as an internalist enterprise: Hermeneutics leads to certitude, Ronell notes in *Stupidity*, "only by turning away from the incomprehensible" (129), away from the *inappropriable* exteriority that sets it in motion to begin with.

While Kent's approach may take a bold step beyond social constructionism, it does not move beyond *internalism*. The triangulating subject escapes the prisonhouse of private language only to be tossed immediately into the slammer of hermeneutic interpretation. And once Kent defines communication *as* successful interpretation, he is free to tune out—he *calls* for a tuning out of—any "marks and noises" that can't be immediately appropriated, run-

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ning a strategic pick on precisely the “interference” that signals meaning’s inappropriated nature and announces to us our finitude, “the unknown [that] we ourselves are,” as Blanchot has put it (25). Kent’s operative presumption is

What I am suggesting, though, is that the event of communication *as such* precedes and exceeds any interpretive endeavor, announcing the *inappropriability* of meaning within which any little hermeneutic fiction would always already be inscribed.

that “[w]ithout interpretation—the ability to get close enough to an understanding that will satisfy both our intentions and beliefs and someone else’s—there can be no communication, no mental states, no thought, no beliefs, and no truth. Interpretation goes all the way down” (*Paralogic* 118). Going all the way, interpretation, according to Kent,

is the condition of possibility for sociality, choreographing social norms and societal standards.

Now, I’m not knocking interpretation; if it were not imperative, “we” would not even be “here,” struggling to work this through. What I am suggesting, though, is that the event of communication *as such* precedes and exceeds any interpretive endeavor, announcing the *inappropriability* of meaning within which any little hermeneutic fiction would always already be inscribed. In its devotion to society’s significations, Kent’s approach neglects community’s *communications* (they aren’t synonymous). Asserting itself here—and I’ll come back to this—is a crucial distinction between hermeneutic and third (sophistic) ears: Whereas the former strive to filter out “static” in order to decipher meaning, the latter snap into high perk at the first instance of any kind of incomprehensible “clatter”—third sophistic ears are posthermeneutic *noise freaks*.

The cell doors slam shut against the “outside” right up front in what seems to me an amazingly *uncharitable* “principle of charity.” For the sake of “understanding,” this principle recommends not that the speaker identify with the audience, which is the standard rhetorical move (and which has its own problems),² but rather that the interlocutors engage in a mutual appropriation of the other as if this other were *just like me*. Every possibility for “receiv[ing] from the Other beyond the capacity of the I,” as Levinas puts it in *Totality and Infinity* (51), is here sacrificed in the name of “communication.” Levinas’s ethic of radical hospitality, which welcomes the other *as Other* (and so risks the Self for the sake of the Other), offers a dramatic contrast to Kent’s depiction of the principle of charity, which absorbs the otherness the other, making it into a reflection of the Self. Limiting communication to maieutics, to a reaffirmation of what one already knows or what one is already programmed to assimilate, this act of “charity” reaffirms the myth, *staving off* “the outside.” It will be

helpful to go directly to *Totality and Infinity* here, the subtitle of which, by the way, is "An Essay on Exteriority."

Here's Levinas: "To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I" (*Totality* 51, emphasis in original). And as Derrida points out, this "to receive . . . receives only to the extent, an extent beyond all measure, that it receives *beyond* the capacity of the I" ("A Word" 26, emphasis added). Conversation is not "that which fuses you to me," Ronell observes, "but the experience of Conversation induces, once again, the vertigo of expropriation" (*Dictations* xii). When I converse with you, I find myself extended toward you, exposed to you, put into relation with you—I find myself, that is, *outside* mySelf; Levinas says: I find myself while "losing" myself (*Otherwise* 11). However, as Ronell points out, "it is not only the case that I'm no longer identical to myself when I begin to converse with you, but more severely, perhaps: you are no longer the one I have interiorized or memorized" (*Dictations* xii-xiii). Exceeding and so disturbing my every attempt to comprehend you as an object, you—when you approach me in conversation—*make an entry* into my "world," effecting a rupture, shaking my little web of beliefs. You break through your own "plastic essence," Levinas says, "like someone who opens a window on which his figure is outlined," manifesting a "surplus over the inevitable paralysis of [your own] manifestation" ("Trace" 351–52). I can interpret who you are and what you say within a socio-historical context, but I cannot account for this inappropriable surplus, which continually interrupts and interferes with any interpretive endeavor.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas continues: "But this [radical receiving] also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching [enseignement]. Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain" (51). "Maieutics," Derrida observes, "teaches me nothing. It reveals nothing to me. It unveils only what I am already in a position [*à mène*] to know *myself* [*moi même*] (*ipse*), capable of knowing [*pouvoir savoir*] by *myself*, in this place where the *self*, the same . . . gathers *in itself* capacity and knowing, power and knowledge." Maieutics, that is, announces "a certain appropriative interpretation" ("A Word" 17–18)—which, contra Kent, does not (and cannot) go "all the way down" (*Paralogic* 118). Rather conversation is a *teaching*, Ronell writes, inasmuch as it introduces me to "a surplus that comes from elsewhere and that

can no more be assimilated by me, than it can domesticate itself in me" (*Dictations* xiii). What Levinas calls conversation's "non-violent transitivity" (*Totality* 51) involves a welcoming of this inassimilable surplus, this trace of the Other, of the outside.

Whereas for Kent the value of dialogue is entirely utilitarian, entailing the comprehension/appropriation of the said to "get things done in the world" (108), Levinas observes that conversation, the relation with the Other, always involves an ethical saying that exceeds my comprehension, touching off an expropriating process of *unlearning* that *teaches* me what (and that) I will never finally and fully have understood.

The teaching that conversation implies is not a function of its content or thematics; it's not a function of *what* gets said. Rather, conversation is a teaching inasmuch as it involves a *saying* (to put it in Levinas's later terminology) that cannot be reduced to the said. The saying is "where" my encounter with or exposure to the other takes place; it is a "de-posing or desitua-ting" that serves as "a condition for all communication" (*Otherwise* 48). When you

address me, what you communicate exceeds any intentionality and brings me more than "I" can hold, "overwhelming the very egoism of [my] I" (Levinas, "Trace" 353). Whereas for Kent the value of dialogue is entirely utilitarian, entailing the comprehension/appropriation of the said to "get things done in the world" (108), Levinas observes that conversation, the relation with the Other, always involves an ethical saying that exceeds my comprehension, touching off an *expropriating* process of *unlearning* that *teaches* me what (and that) I will never finally and fully have understood.

Whenever "communication" is reduced to concept exchange between so-called enunciating subjectivities (or intersubjectivities, same thing), whenever it proceeds (only) in the name of comprehension (recognition)—that is, whenever it occurs "easily and happily"—it has already turned away from the outside, already given the Other the squeeze. At one level, then, an externalist approach to communication would demand that discursive *convention*—which patrols the borders of what is speakable and of who's allowed to speak in any given exchange, as Susan Jarratt (209) and Michelle Ballif ("Writing" 58-59) remind us—be rigorously and perpetually interrogated.³ It would oblige one to proceed not according to "rough maxims and methodological generalities" but, as Nietzsche suggested, with "an absolute skepticism toward all inherited concepts" (*Will* 221). And/but at another level, because the inscription of *any* concept is simultaneously the *exscription* of finite existence, taking an externalist, *communitarian* approach to communication would (also) mean attuning oneself to that which *exceeds* conceptualization.

The limit(s) of/and interpretation

Nonunderstanding is another name for finitude.

—Avital Ronell, *Stupidity*

There is no said without the saying, no meaning or sense without exposure, which indicates “the impossibility of communicating anything at all,” as Nancy observes, “without touching the limit where all meaning [*sens*] spills out of itself, like a simple ink stain on a word, on the word ‘meaning’” (“Exscription” 319). In communication, before anything else, before any “transfer of messages,” Nancy notes, “what takes place is an *exposition*: finite existence exposed to finite existence, co-appearing before it and with it” (*Inoperative* xl). Communications begin in the approach, in the being-*toward*-others, which “makes, demands, or proposes sense this side of or beyond all signification” (*Sense* 7). Sender-receiver theories of communication that push “reasonable exchange,” that focus narrowly on “speakers” and “messages” tune out these *ek-static* communications, and so turn away from the outside. Message exchange has to do with “society,” Nancy observes, but not with *community*, where “nothing is shared without *also* being removed from this kind of ‘communication’” (“Exscription” 319).

Finitude, what we share, cannot be grasped in a concept or represented in significations; and yet, its very exposure “is what is at stake in inscription. By inscribing significations,” Nancy observes, “we exscribe the presence of what withdraws from all significations, being itself (life, passion, matter . . .)” (“Exscription” 339). This is why writing or speaking, any performance of the inscription, is both inevitably empty and also imperative: It is in the inscription that finitude *exposes itself*. So it’s not exactly that finite singularity is unrepresentable but that in its *withdrawal* from presentation, “it presents itself exscribed,” excribed right there *in* the inscription (“Exscription” 339). And this, Nancy insists, “is the implacable, joyous counterblow that must be struck against all hermeneutics” (“Exscription” 340).

Though finitude is, strictly speaking, *unspeakable*, it’s not incommunicable: It communicates itself constantly, irrepressibly, as inscription’s exscriptions. The saying continuously haunts the said, coming through in textual disturbances, interruptions in the manifestation of meaning and being.

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Levinas says it comes through as “a blinking of meaning” (*Otherwise* 152). Thanks in part to the purely performative dimension of language, to what Paul de Man calls the “text machine”—which is responsible, Ronell writes, “for effects of meaning generated by sheer contingency, elements of uncontrol and improvisation” (*Stupidity* 170)—the exscribed does leave a(n inassimilable) trace.⁴ That is, thanks in part to *language’s* finitude—to what Vitanza has called the “anti-body rhetoric” or *dissoi-paralogoi*, which sparks “the proliferation of meaning in discourse” (“Critical Sub/Versions” 47)—the exscribed does manage to crash inscription’s party, intruding on the festivities by making some sstatic-y noise, gesturing to us from the door (from the outside).

Hermeneuts necessarily miss it, though, when they disregard any involuntary “marks and noises” that might *interfere* with the interpretation of the “message,” when they imagine writing or speaking to be a mere *means* of communication rather than communication

Third (sophistic) ears, in contradistinction, scan feverishly for those disruptive bursts of the unintelligible that take the mega-drive of interpretation down to an iffy wobble; for those uncanny communications that, for an instant, evict the “communicating subject” from the homelike shelter of her own little “web of beliefs.”

as such, a saying; a trace of alterity and the exposition of community. Nancy goes the other way, calling any performance of the inscription “communication itself, an exposure” (*Inoperative* 31). Messages, of course, are not unimportant, but again “the function of the message concerns society,”

Nancy writes; “it does not take place in community” (*Inoperative* 73). Community’s communications do not found a politics nor institute a mode of sociality—they do not *work*—but they do expose the limit, the ectopical between-us “space” or ethical “zone” where any politics or social organization ought to begin (and end). “A politics that does not want to know anything about this is a mythology,” Nancy observes, “or an economy” (*Inoperative* 81).

The general point of contention between third sophistic and hermeneutic ears comes down to this: The latter do not attend to the incessant murmur/mutter of the exiled-exscribed excess that must be tuned out for meaning to *land*, to stabilize. Third (sophistic) ears, in contradistinction, scan feverishly for those disruptive bursts of the unintelligible that take the mega-drive of interpretation down to an iffy wobble; for those uncanny communications that, for an instant, evict the “communicating subject” from the homelike shelter of her own little “web of beliefs.” That is, third (sophistic) ears attune themselves to those *ek-static* communications that expose an existent to her being-*in*-the-world, which is another way of saying, being-*without*-shelter. In tuning out

the “noise,” Kent’s approach supports the shelter; and it’s to the extent that it does that it will also hail Thompsons—writers very sure of who they are, very certain of their interpretations, and so mostly alienated from what they share with others: their absolute exposure, their infinite finitude.

Some notes toward a communitarian literacy

The fragility of finitude . . . counts on the finite here and now, which is not calibrated solely on the time infused with grandiose plans and decisive gestures of sovereignty. The fragility of finitude has everything to do with those moments of hijacked existence, the motionless time of destitution, the waiting period when something is expected to happen. There is recovery time, there are dead zones, hollow times, times of futile effort, the empty interval, and bad timing; there is leisure time, the musical tempo, the meanwhile, the time you went out for a walk. . . . Without the consolation, the wish fulfillment of dialectical appropriations, there is the serious untimeliness of différance. The appearance of infinite différance is itself finite.

—Avital Ronell, *Finitude’s Score*

It’s not clear how writers, who could not *write* without touching the limit where “*you shares me*,” as Nancy puts it (*Inoperative* 29, emphasis in original), can maintain the serene delusions of identity posited by (a personal or universal) history. It possibly has to do with finitude’s fragility: Despite its incessant clamor, it’s easily drowned out by the boom of dialectics; despite its untimely, diachronic time, it’s easily fixed in the situating flex of *chronos*. If finitude were foregrounded, though—and what else is Vitanzan third sophistic but a foregrounding of finitude?—history itself would have to be radically redefined: not according to immanence’s registers of being and difference but according to finitude’s registers of becoming and *différance*. And one thing is clear: No notion of the “composing subject” would make it out alive. The shift from immanence to finitude would require a significant redescription of “the writer” and “writing,” and therefore a radical re-vision of the goals of composition theory and pedagogy. I promised some notes in this direction, an attempt to *open* the conversation:

The shift from immanence to finitude would require a significant redescription of “the writer” and “writing,” and therefore a radical re-vision of the goals of composition theory and pedagogy.

1a) The “writer” is not an immanent subject but a finite (and so imminent) be-coming—it’ll be necessary to create idioms for such nonsubjective singularities. Deleuze offers the term “haecceity,” for example, to designate nonpersonal, “event-type individuations . . . where there’s no subject” (115), where a proper name indicates a relational force *taking place* in the finite here

Conversation, once again, implies an encounter with the other that involves not a mutual appropriation but a double deterritorialization, a common but dissymmetrical *unworking* of identity.

and now. Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, describe haecceities as individuations consisting “entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and to be affected.” Indeed, “a season, a winter, a summer, an hour,” they observe, “have a perfect individuality lacking

nothing, even though this individuality is different from a thing or a subject” (261). As haecceity—which “is what you are, and that you are but that,” they write—“You are longitude and latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of non-subjectified affects” (262). Haecceities, pure events that provoke and undergo change with every “encounter,” are capable, Deleuze says, “of ousting the verb ‘to be’ and its attributes” (141), capable of nudging notions of fixed, immanent being into the between-us space of finite becomings—where everything (communal) is happening.

1b) But becoming, Deleuze observes, is never about assimilation or imitation. It’s not that one becomes what one encounters but that when each encounters the other “an effect, a zigzag . . . passes or happens” in the between of the two, sparking “an a-parallel evolution” (Deleuze and Parnet 6–7). Becoming, then, is always double—*what* one is becoming is *also* perpetually becoming—so one can never be quite sure where one is headed. “It is like Mozart’s birds,” Deleuze notes: “in the music there is a bird-becoming, but caught in a music-becoming of the bird, the two forming a single becoming, a single bloc, an a-parallel evolution—not an exchange, but a ‘confidence with no possible interlocutor’ . . . in short, a conversation” (Deleuze and Parnet 3). Conversation, once again, implies an encounter with the other that involves not a mutual appropriation but a double deterritorialization, a common but dissymmetrical *unworking* of identity.

2a) Writing, even when it performs an im-position of immanence, involves an ex-position of imminence; that is, writing irrepressibly entails a be-coming. You (writing-being) are a limit-cruiser, so even when you’re alone, you are not alone. You are (already) heavily populated with encounters, with others whom you have welcomed and who continue to work you over—to live on in you,

haunting you and making demands of you—even in your solitude. This is why Deleuze and Guattari can suggest, contra Freud, that your head is “fundamentally a crowd” (29); and it’s why Deleuze can later note that “even when you think you’re writing on your own, you’re always doing it with someone else you can’t always name” (141). This *we-who-writes* doesn’t work “together” (in the typical sense of collaboration) but *between* the two, at the limit, where the encounter with the Other necessarily takes “you” out: You are written, or as Ronell says, you are “overwritten” (*Stupidity* 45) by it. Writing is in this sense always a mode of conversation, which, Ronell observes, “disrupts the possibility of a simple history because it dispenses with a personal or universal narrative in favor of what could happen to us between ourselves when we expose ourselves to this space, which belongs neither to the one nor the other” (*Dictations* xv).

2b) Because this “overwriting,” this be-coming that writing entails is covered over by the bulldozer of immanence whenever writing is designated in the active voice, it may be helpful, as Roland Barthes has suggested, to express the verb “to write” in the middle voice, which indicates that the subject is affected, moved by the action of the verb. In the middle voice, the past tense of “to write” becomes “I am written,” which indicates not simple passivity (“somebody wrote me”) but a mode of receptivity on the part of the one who writes, a “passibility,” as Lyotard puts it (“Resisting” 403; *The Inhuman* 116–17), that is not simply *inactive*. This “I am written” indicates an agency that is situated and *co-piloted*, an agency whose radical creativity begins not by asserting an identity but rather, as Hélène Cixous observes, with “a leaving oneself go” (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 41). Barthes suggests that when the verb “to write” is expressed in the middle voice, “the distance between the *scriptor* and language diminishes asymptotically.” The middle voice exposes the writer (writing-being) as “constituted,” as a writing-be(com)ing that is “immediately contemporary with the writing, being effected and affected by it” (19).

2c) There is no way to write without being-written; therefore, in a certain sense, there is no way for an I(dentity) to *survive* an engagement with writing. One does return from it, but—as Nancy says of the return from love—one returns “broken” (*Inoperative* 96), re-acquainted with one’s irreparable exposure and excessive inappropriability. This is why Cixous, for example, can say that writing is about “learning to die” (10): It (re)introduces me to my finitude, to my-self as exposed, ruptured. Writing (re)assures me that I am already given over to the outside, to the Other, who calls to me and compels me to respond. Writing is in this sense convoked; it is a response that also serves as a return call/summons, which I (“I”) address to the other at the limit. So in stark con-

trast both to process pedagogy's internalist depictions of the writer as purveyor of the mind's (undistorted) contents and to Kent's hermeneutic, post-

Inasmuch as writing always entails an encounter, it takes place *on the limit*: It is not an I-identity booster but an I-identity buster, an exposure.

process depictions of the writer as someone with something to say, Ronell compares writing to drugging, inasmuch as both involve an experience of declension and deappropriation, a mode of departing

that's never quite sure where it's going (*Crack Wars* 106–07; “Confessions” 255). Inasmuch as writing always entails an encounter, it takes place *on the limit*: It is not an I-identity booster but an I-identity buster, an exposure.

3a) In the shift from immanence to finitude, interpretation (understanding) takes a back seat to exposition (encounter). Interpretative literacy is not precluded, obviously—it is necessary—but it is *preceded* by a kind of primary, communitarian literacy. Community does not take place in what Nancy calls the “myth of dialogue,” which is also the “myth of the intersubjective”; it does not take place when I “hear in [dialogue or in a text] what the other *wants to say* (to me).” It takes place, rather, in the instant that the myth is interrupted, and suddenly “I hear in it that the other . . . speaks” (*Inoperative* 76, emphasis in original). The instant that I “hear” the saying in the said, I encounter the other *as Other*—fragile, mortal, inappropriable: *finite*.

3b) A communitarian literacy turns *toward* the inappropriable outside, toward the incomprehensible. Attuned to an/other kind of reading protocol—attuned, that is, to *reading* rather than to interpretation—communitarian readers ignore the “principle of charity” and proceed instead in the mode of an excessive hospitality, welcoming the incomprehensible Other in a posture of extreme humility. Communitarian reading involves this humble receptivity, this surrender that opens to more than the “I” can hold, that strains “against the burden of meaning,” as Nancy puts it—not in a nonsensical or frivolous way but in a way that “weigh[s] on meaning itself” (“Exscription” 336).

This reading, which struggles to remain open to a sense, to a relation or a saying that precedes and exceeds signification, cannot be reduced to interpreting: Whereas interpretation “masters interference and the contingencies of textual disturbance,” Ronell explains, “[r]eading enters the zone of non-understanding and tries at some level to manage the distress which the text releases” (*Stupidity* 175). Reading “proceeds according to the logic of disturbance, casting the drama of understanding against the comforting smoothness of interpretive synthesis” (178). “Having understood, or thinking one has understood,” Ronell writes, “stands precisely on a refusal to read” (*Stupidity* 277).

Reading “must remain weighty, hampered,” Nancy notes, “and, without ceasing to decode, must stay just this side of decoding,” giving itself “over to the sudden, flashing, slipping movement of a writing that precedes it.” Reading *unworks* the text and “advances unknowing,” interrupting the “supposed continuum of meaning” by remaining “caught in the odd materiality of language” (“Exscription” 336–37)—or, as Nietzsche wanted, by tuning into “all the individual words . . . [and] syllables” and welcoming their proliferation of effects (*Beyond* 105). This “beginning reading” Nancy adds, “doesn’t know where it is going, and it doesn’t have to know. [But] no other reading is possible without it, and every ‘reading’ (in the sense of commentary, exegesis, interpretation) must come back to it” (“Exscription” 337).⁵

3c) Communitarian writers *invite* this reading, this unworking of the work. They do not aim to establish a stable and authoritative ethos nor to put forth an unambiguous message; they aim to amplify the irreparable *instability* and extreme *vulnerability* to which any writing necessarily testifies. A communitarian writer strives, as Nancy says, to offer an inscription that *incompletes* its “author” and its “message,” a fragmented inscription that refuses to “*complete a figure*, or a figuration,” and so that refuses to “impose the content or the exemplary (which also means also . . . mythic) message of the figure” (*Inoperative* 79, emphasis in original). Though the communitarian writer writes *because* there are others, “he [*sic*] does not envisage his project as one that involves communicating something to them, be it a message or himself.” Messages and persons must be communicated, of course, but this writing “obeys the sole necessity of exposing the limit: not the limit of communication, *but the limit upon which communication takes place*” (*Inoperative* 67, emphasis in original).

Kent argues that “the most fundamental activity of discourse production is the hermeneutic act: the interpretive guess we must make about our hearer’s or reader’s code that occurs even before invention becomes possible” (“Paralogic Hermeneutics” 26–27). But before and beyond any subject’s interpretive endeavor, one is exposed to the other, extended toward the other, open to the other’s effraction. A communitarian writer’s primary aim is to communicate or recall this irreparable exposure, to offer up a saying that resists being drowned out by the said. Therefore, this writer doesn’t freak out over the possibility of being misinterpreted (*mis-recognized*); s/he just sends out texts, as Ronell puts

Attuned to an/other kind of reading protocol—attuned, that is, to reading rather than to interpretation—communitarian readers ignore the “principle of charity” and proceed instead in the mode of an excessive hospitality, welcoming the incomprehensible Other in a posture of extreme humility.

it, “rigorously affirm[ing] their having been sent and having gone out to do whatever it is they have to do” (“Confessions” 280). Indeed, this writer *strives*

This primary literacy does not prohibit a secondary, interpretive literacy. It’s primary only in the sense that it must come *first* and *last*: Arising from and ultimately returning to the limit, to the *unworking* both of the writer and of writing, it precedes and exceeds—interrupts, disturbs, unsettles—the Thompson-effect.

“to write texts that don’t return,” that “take off on their own,” Derrida says, like a child that “starts talking and goes on talking by itself, without your help, who doesn’t even answer you except in your fantasy” (*Ear* 157).⁶

Again, this primary literacy does not prohibit a secondary, interpretive literacy. It’s primary only in the sense that it must come *first* and *last*: Arising from and ultimately returning to the limit, to the *unworking* both of the writer and of writing, it precedes and exceeds—interrupts, disturbs, unsettles—the Thompson-effect.

A baby-step for pedagogy

It seems to me ethically imperative to begin developing (especially first year) writing pedagogies that embrace and advance this communitarian literacy, that promote a writing and a reading that *call identity into question*, marking an encounter, an exposure—a becoming. This will be no easy task; it will require that we rethink some longstanding pedagogical traditions and assumptions. But as a way of getting out on a hopeful note, I want to acknowledge a recent move in this general direction: Gary Olson, in his insightful contribution to Kent’s collection on post-process theory, challenges what he calls “the rhetoric of assertion,” effectively clearing the way for us to bust a (communitarian) move. Writing in the typical composition course, Olson observes, is associated with “asserting something to be true,” with advocating a position in a “strong,” “clear” thesis and “construct[ing] a piece of discourse that then ‘supports’ the position” without “irrelevant” interruptions (9). Even when teachers assign “exploratory” essays or personal narratives, Olson observes, they tend still to expect the writing to work seamlessly toward “a point or points,” which again promotes “the Western, rationalist tradition of assertion and support” (9). It also—and this is why we are here—propagates the myth by fostering Thompsons. Aligning this thesis-flexing rhetoric with “the discourse of mastery,” Olson encourages the field to dump such “masculinist, phallogocentric, foundationalist” approaches to writing and to encourage students to take a “more dialogic, dynamic, open-ended, receptive, non-assertive stance” (14).

With a grateful nod to Olson, I’ll venture a pedagogical baby-step into

this clearing. Having ditched “the rhetoric of assertion,” a first-year writing course might adopt a rhetoric of *exposition* and reclaim the sense of “essay” that it implies, making writing a way of testing out possibilities, trying out questions together: writing as a way of putting oneSelf into question by initiating conversation. The idea (the point) would not be to encourage a point- or thesis-free essay but to admit and to affirm the thesis as a mark of *exposure*: It indicates not power or knowledge or mastery but naked vulnerability. To state one’s thesis is to risk oneself, to open toward others; it is to initiate an approach, an encounter, a becoming. Thus, the goal of writing would not be to defend one’s thesis and then cleanly and clearly to *wrap up*. Rather, the stated goal of the essay in such a course would be to hold the door open on this thesis (and so, on one’s writing-being), to keep it exposed to various encounters, interruptions, contradictions—to resist the urge to turn away from the “outside” in order to finish off the conversation. Assigned essays in this course would ask not for the closing off that feigns mastery but for the opening up that perpetuates the inquiry, that keeps the conversation going.

The rhetoric of assertion is anti-communitarian, presuming that rigorous inquiry leads one to self-sufficient certainty, which can be asserted in a “strong and clear” thesis and supported with a mound of “irrefutable” evidence. The rhetoric of exposition, however, is communitarian, acknowledging that rigorous inquiry leads one, again and again, precisely to the *unsettling* of certitude—and so to the continual exposition of what “we” share. Adopting this rhetoric of exposition and its attendant sense of the essay as a way of testing out questions, of *initiating* conversation, could be one small step, then, toward the development of a writing pedagogy that promotes a communitarian literacy. And it’s in the name of this infinite conversation that I abandon these incomplete notes here, on the limit, leaving the next step(s) to you.

Acknowledgment

This essay is dedicated to Avital Ronell, who graciously allowed me to read Stupidity in typescript. Her re-scripting of nonknowledge as an ethical position (“I am stupid before the other”) affirms a kind of messianic sense of knowing: knowing as permanently imminent, coming—knowing as an effect of a radically hospitable openness toward the other, who remains irreparably Other, finite and inassimilable. Stupidity inspired this essay, I’m pleased to say, and all references to it here are to the typescript version.

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Notes

1. For an intricate teasing through of this tendency in composition studies, see Michelle Ballif's excellent essay, "Seducing Composition: A Challenge to Identity-Disclosing Pedagogies."

2. See, for example, my "Addicted to Love." Or, for the problems associated with the reverse demand, that the audience identify with the speaker, see Ballif's "What Is It that the Audience Wants?"

3. Sid Dobrin also nails this part of the problem in his contribution to Kent's collection on post-process theory, noting that "the instance of triangulation is the moment of power" and arguing that race, culture, class, and gender affect "one's prior theories, which determine one's passing theories" (142).

4. Kent takes de Man up just long enough to toss him aside, finding him a bit of a conventionalist who does not challenge "the classical paradigm as the representation for rhetoric" (*Paralogic* 23). But de Man's exposition of language's "implacable determination" to deterritorialize its own (cognitive) territories, to disfigure its own figures, troubles any easy conflation of communication with hermeneutic understanding.

5. In *Reception Histories* Mailloux defines "the act of interpretation" as "reading, explicating, making sense" (43), but I'm trying to distinguish between precisely what Mailloux is conflating here: (hermeneutic) interpretation and *reading*.

6. For a compelling discussion of a similar approach, see Ballif's "What Is It that the Audience Wants?" Also Levinas: "A work conceived radically is a movement of the same unto the other which never returns to the same. To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever for a yet unknown land" ("Trace" 348).

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